

January 2020

The legendary Laurie Wells (1931 - 2007)



George Laurence Wells, better known as Laurie, was a pioneer of dairy mating services in Australia and a mentor to many of the industry's past and current leaders. From January 2020, the NHIA Meritorious Award was renamed in his honour.

Laurie was devoted to breeding and herd improvement his entire life. Growing up on a dairy farm on the outskirts of Bacchus Marsh, his annual highlight was a week at the Royal Melbourne Show where he had front row seats to watch dairy cow judging. As an adult he had a dairy farm for a number of years before joining VAB (which became Genetics Australia).

Laurie joined VAB as a farm hand but held a variety of roles during his 26 years with the company. His photographic memory and knowledge of dairy cows saw VAB establish what was probably Australia's first mating service – the VAB Herd Evaluation Service (HES) and Laurie was the ideal person to head the service. The role took him to commercial dairy herds around Australia offering mating suggestions that took into account weaknesses of individual cows and inbreeding; this was long before computerised records and mating programs. Laurie's advice resulted in rapid improvement in production and type of cows in commercial herds.

His influence was not just in developing herds but also in developing people. Many of the top names in today's herd improvement industry were encouraged and mentored by Laurie from a young age.

After visiting the Leslie herd in Gippsland, Laurie came back to VAB with a cassette of a very young Brian Leslie who had recorded a mock auction using VAB sire catalogues. Laurie was impressed and followed Brian's career with great pride, remaining close friends all his life.

Jacqui Biddulph, is now a WA dairy farmer but started her career as the Australia's first female sales representative in the AI industry. She describes Laurie as a patient teacher, willing to impart his dairy cow knowledge and show the quality of cows in commercial herds.

Rob Derksen, Genetics Australia Export Manager says Laurie taught him a great deal about assessing cows and identifying progeny test daughters to photograph for bull catalogues. He describes Laurie as having an infectious enthusiasm for quality cows and the first person in Australia to get commercial farmers interested in their cows.



Laurie worked with VAB Sire Analyst Peter Williams (now with DataGene) to import a young bull from the USA called Caenarvon Cleitus JUDGE, a bull that had a profound impact on the Australian dairy herd over many years.

Laurie's uncanny ability to evaluate and recognise good dairy cows received worldwide recognition in 1987 when he was awarded first place in the Hoards Dairyman Cow Judging photography contest where he placed ahead of more than 80,000 entries from 37 countries.

Despite, retiring due to ill-health, Laurie continued his interest in dairy cattle, often attending IDW, critiquing the judges to see if they placed the cows in the right order.

To this day he is missed by his colleagues, industry representatives, semen resellers and the many dairy farmers he regularly visited.



For further information please contact NHIA via email: office@nhia.org.au or phone: 1300 844 220.

About NHIA

Formed in 1995 as the successor to the Herd Improvement Organisation Victoria, The National Herd Improvement Association of Australia Incorporated (NHIA) is the industry organisation that promotes herd improvement within the Australian dairy industry, providing a range of services to its membership, and through that membership, to benefit Australian dairy farmers.

The member base includes organisations involved directly in the provision of herd improvement services, a range of activities that lead to productivity gains to farmers as well as herd industry improvement suppliers.